



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 108

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "**STRENGTH-BASED**" ORGANIZATION (PART 2)

The Twelve Key Questions

"What lies at the heart of a great workplace?" was the first question the authors needed to answer. In other words, "Which elements will attract only talented employees and keep them, and which elements are appealing to every employee, the best and the rest?" "Do talented employees really care about how empowered they are, as long as they are paid well?" Once these basic needs are met, perhaps talented employees care less about pay and benefits than they do about being trusted by their supervisor. Are companies wasting money by investing in better workspaces? Or do talented employees value a clean and safe physical environment above all else? The authors set about to develop measures by answering these types of questions.

They wanted to reveal the core elements of strong workplaces - the core elements that create the kind of workplace that can attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees. By using statistical analysis of a most massive amount of data, the authors looked to find the "key" questions that were the best measurement of each factor. Pouring over millions of typical workplace, worker, and organizational cultural questions (similar to our Workforce Cultural Audit), they were most interested in those special questions where the most engaged employees - those who were loyal and productive - answered positively, and everyone else - the average performers and those that weren't engaged at all - answered neutrally or negatively.

Questions that you may think would be critical, such as pay and benefits, were not determinates of the best workplaces. As they continued to analyze the data and cull the most differentiating questions, they made a most interesting discovery - measuring the strength of a workplace can be simplified to just twelve questions! While the twelve questions do not capture everything you or your organization may want to know about your workplace, they do capture the most information and the most important information. **At the very core of exceptional workplaces, the most talented employees are attracted, focused and kept when they answer "strongly agree" to the following:**

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?

3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the past seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel like my work is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the past six months, have I talked with someone about my progress?
12. At work, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

These twelve questions are the simplest and most accurate way to measure the strength of a workplace - the precise questions that were revealed as most powerful. **If you can create the environment where all employees answer positively to all twelve questions, then you have built a great place to work.**

Note that many of the questions contain an extreme - where it is difficult to answer "strongly agree" or give it a "5" on a scale of 1 to 5. Questions 3 and 10 are good examples since they call for a response of "best." Phrased like this they tend to be powerful discriminators, a good measuring stick between the most productive workplaces and the rest. With little doubt you knew that frequent praise and opportunities to excel are important elements of a good workplace. However, with this list we have a means to measure those things that truly make a difference, and to what extent. If most everyone in every workplace always answers "strongly agree" to a particular question, then it doesn't determine why there is a performance difference between workplaces.

Where are the questions on pay, benefits, organizational structure, and senior leadership? Questions on these topics simply didn't discriminate. This doesn't mean they are not important, but rather they may be equal to every employee - the exceptional as well as the below average. Clearly elements such as pay are important, especially if you are to be competitive in the marketplace to recruit and hire talented employees. While this is often critical to get people in the door, they alone will not help you "win" the hearts and minds of your employees and excel in your missions.

Next week: How do the twelve questions relate to unit performance (outcomes)?

Regards, FL Ames

For more information about the research and book 'First Break All the Rules' please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>



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